



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

SCIENTIFIC CRITERIA FOR EFFICIENT DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

By Professor ALBERT H. WRIGHT

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

IN recent years the American public has been treated to much heralding of the advent of efficient government. Ballot changes, civil service reform, investigations of research and efficiency bureaus, proposals for more businesslike administration of public office and devices for giving freer expression to the popular will have been offered at various times. Severally they represent faith in the punishment of wrongdoers, confidence in the methods of private business, or trust in the wisdom of a powerful electorate, for the development of sound and satisfactory government. Excellent as some of these proposals are, they furnish no answer to grave questions which have been forced on democracies in recent months. What is the aim or goal of democratic government? Can democratic government survive the rude shock of a great public trial? How may it escape the dangers due to conditions bred of its chiefest virtues? How may it, in a social order as yet imperfectly understood, find the knowledge and the method requisite for the formulation and prosecution of social policies vital to its continued existence?

For our American democracy we have at the least the first of these questions answered. Whether by reference to the operation of government, the pronouncements of party leaders, or public opinion we shall find that the maximum possible of personal liberty and individual opportunity constitutes the aim and justification of our political life. It needs no demonstration that to secure and maintain this condition for all citizens our governmental institutions are put under the duty of developing the material and social resources of the land to the full. It is fairly evident that our present political institutions as they function do not satisfy this ideal requirement. It may be feared that they are ill prepared to face confidently any of the issues in which the continued existence of democratic government is at stake. If the politician and the statesman have failed us, what resources of leadership have we remaining? What more natural than that the social scientist should feel that he should be the guide?

Subject to the sometimes narrow limits of political expediency our governments, local, state, and national, have accepted

the standards of the physical scientist. But the social scientist finds discouragement everywhere. His technique is new, his knowledge is tentative, his method is untried. He may not aspire to the precision of older sciences. His statements are liable to gross misinterpretation as they encounter ingrained beliefs, prejudices, wilful ignorance and resentful selfishness. As if to minimize his efforts the inadequacy of his information forces him to extreme modesty in his claims. Who, for example, would dare set up a standard for population increase? What view on the immigration problem shall prevail? What shall be our decision as to the distribution of social income? There is hardly a matter of major interest to our democracy for which social scientists may claim even tentative standards.

Insufficient knowledge is, of course, no rightful objection to the leadership of social science, if even that knowledge surpasses any other and gives promise for the future. A serious obstacle will be encountered when that leadership is asserted. Those in charge of our governments do not frequently seek the advice of the social scientist. A widely disseminated suffrage furnished a fertile field for the development of the professional politician. The politician responds to the interests, influences or groups which maintain him. The disintegration of government makes the politician necessary to harmonize outdated political institutions with modern social and economic creations. The politician champions fervently the further extension of the electorate that his own position be made more secure. Scientific leadership in politics must await the reconstruction of our political mechanism.

As an accompaniment to the remarkable material progress of the past fifty years we must note the unfortunate, steady deterioration of government, not alone in quality, but in power as well. It is a commonplace of recent American history that from the close of the Civil War to the end of the nineteenth century Americans were so intent upon the conquest of the resources of the country that they neglected public affairs. It was this period which gave over the governments of the country to the professional politician. Other contributing influences may be traced. Certainly a share of the responsibility goes to the inventions which facilitated transportation and communication, thus causing those in charge of these expanding media of commerce to regard state boundaries as artificial obstructions to be surmounted in the interest of developing industry. Likewise, the influences which caused the gradual concentration of the production of certain articles of manufacture

within the limits of a small section, sometimes a single state, helped reduce the power of government. The development of large-scale production, the integration of industrial processes, the concentration of credit control in a few centers, and the growing use of the corporate form of organization all assisted to weaken local governments, obliterate state lines, and render the federal government, to a degree, helpless. The weakening of government was inevitable. Industry grows, rewards, interests, directs. It mingles intimately with the citizen's life. Its returns are tangible and immediate. Business organization responds quickly to demands for change. Our governments are still permeated with eighteenth-century concepts, their organization in part is of the same derivation. Governments move slowly, change seldom, reward poorly. On demand for change they await the slow coalescence of public opinion. It could not have been otherwise than that industry should have loomed large in the popular imagination, that it should have enlisted popular interest and that government the while should have suffered increasing obscurity. Consequently when industry used the politician to turn the creaking wheels of government in its interest, every social or economic group with a vestige of power turned to the same practice, thus making the politician fairly secure.

Rightly or wrongly, political stocktaking will show us a national government restricted in power as is no other great national government because based on a constitutional system constructed in apprehension of rather than in confidence in democratic institutions. We shall find our state governments monotonously alike in their main outlines, and largely based on obsolete constitutional principles. Some local governments we shall find responsive to democratic impulses, but many more restricted in power and at the mercy of the state legislature. The entire system is managed by party leaders who must placate supporting interests and who rarely dare disinterested public service. Before executive officers and legislators, who hold office by the caprice of popular election, press various groups seeking protection for their class interests. Legislation and administration reflect class demands. Governments thus become mere prizes of power and their results, spoils, concessions, or compromises.

Hardly an encouraging outlook for the efforts of social science! Seemingly a double duty is enjoined. The student of social science must continue his study of social phenomena for the evolution of definite standards for social action. At the

same time he must strive for the creation of conditions which will afford opportunity for the development of his leadership. Such action is, clearly, not the sole prerogative of the social scientist, but he must assume a leading part in the forward movement.

What can be done? How can a democracy be persuaded to change its habits? What changes will bring the promise of scientific leadership? Leaving aside the familiar contention that popular education through the shaping of public opinion will achieve the desired end—an optimistic outlook of doubtful value—we may suggest some few changes which will make less difficult the reshaping of democratic government. Undoubtedly one favoring condition for the professional politician lies in the ease with which the privilege of the suffrage may be secured and used. When the indifferent, the uninformed and the incapable voters determine election results for the benefit of the political worker patriotic intelligence is placed under a heavy handicap. This evil might be minimized by (1) requiring of both naturalized and native citizen preliminary training for the initial use of the suffrage, (2) by the elimination of mentally subnormal voters by appropriate psychological tests—if competent for school children and soldiers why not for voters—and (3) by basing registration for elections on the voter's knowledge of the issues or candidacies involved in the forthcoming contest. Perhaps we may take a lesson from ancient Athens, whose youths began civic responsibilities at eighteen but gained political privileges only gradually thereafter, reaching full privileges at thirty. The vote will be prized only when it is worth prizing. From an intelligent electorate may we not expect conscientious service and a chance for educated leadership?

To-day the fitness of an elected official for the duties of his office is a matter of pure chance. Indeed, candidates have been rejected at the polls for apparently no other reason than that they were competent. This seemingly hopeless condition may possibly be remedied in some degree in the future if universities undertake the training of young men of executive promise who desire to enter public service for the definite purpose of seeking public executive positions which offer the chance of determining political policies. It should be possible thus to train local leaders to compete with local politicians on more than equal terms.

For our present legislative lottery must be substituted something better. At present any member of a legislature can in-

introduce measures at will. No important bill can be considered until several rival measures have been pigeonholed. Even then the bill is subject to the tender mercies of committee action, proposed and actual amendment when before the whole body, change in the other house of the legislature, the compromises of a conference committee and possible executive veto. The executive's program of legislation should be given the right of way. The bills should be drafted by an expert draftsman working under the direction of a committee of competent authorities on the subject-matter of the measure. Amendments should be permitted only with the consent of the drafting committee. When it is recognized that legislation is a science we shall be well toward an efficient democracy.

Finally, constitutional changes should be constructed in quite different fashion from present methods. Reverence for custom and imitation may have their uses, but they are hardly reliable guides for the reconstruction of government. Piecemeal change has slight justification, if a single gain is used as an excuse to preserve several outworn practises. Periodically the whole social and economic structure of the governmental area should be examined, the standards and desires of all groups ascertained and then a governmental organization be framed in the light of this information for the realization of democratic aims without regard to the fate of the old framework. We should cease trying to make society conform to what a few consider correct government, and instead mold our government to conform to the facts of society.

If, throughout our operation of political institutions we advance patiently to the acceptance of the experimental attitude and the method of social diagnosis as our basis of action, democracy may presently be safe for scientific standards.

RAILROAD FINANCE FROM THE STANDPOINT OF EFFICIENCY

By Professor HOWARD C. KIDD

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

IN studying the problems of railroad finance and credit, there are two angles of approach: rates and costs. The first is in the hands of the Interstate Commerce Commission; the second is in the hands of the railroads.

The solution of the financial problem through increased